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SUNDAY
MAY 2, 1954

The mosquitoes won a decision over me last night and are resting this morning, surfeited, around the walls. I had my first hot mud application. They coat you with it, leave you perspiring for fifteen minutes, hose you off, plunge you into a boiling bath, scrape off the remainder of the filth, wrap you in towelling and tell you to lie down for a quarter of an hour. I feel weak but possibly drained of rheumatism.

We hired a car this sunny afternoon and drove to Vicenza. What a heavenly city. The Olimpia Theatre is a dream. Palladio lived from about 1508 to 1580, and this was his last important work -- certainly it must be the most beautiful theatre ever designed and decorated. We visited the Piazza dei Signori, a little San Marco, with the Venetian lion prominently displayed, as is fitting in a city known as Venice's eldest daughter. Our nice driver was an ignoramus when it came to Italian history. With difficulty, we directed him to the hills, where we saw La Rotonda, another of Andrea Palladio's creations. It is crumbling and unkempt, but splendid despite its desolation. Mereworth Castle in Kent, Michael Tree's house, is said to be an adaptation of it. Nearby, we visited the Villa Valmarana. Lovely view and gardens, and the lower floor of the house frescoed by Gian Battista Tiepolo, a fabulous performance, with scenes from the Iliad, the Odyssey, Orlando Furioso, and Jerusalem Liberated. The owner, one of the Valmarana family, let us into the Foresteria adjoining the Villa, which looks as if it must have been a one-story hunting lodge. I've never seen such pleasing frescoes, also by Tiepolo, most of them trompe l'oeil, many of the scenes Venetian.

Dined tonight with the Lanes, who had spent the day in Venice.

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